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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000465

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CARC

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SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN: NEW OSCE AMBASSADOR TO CONTINUE  
PUSHING REFORM

Classified By: Ambassador Anne E. Derse, for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The new head of the OSCE Office in Baku, Ambassador Ali Bilge Cankorel, told the Ambassador on June 1 that as a career Turkish diplomat, there was some concern before his arrival that he would not actively promote political reforms in Azerbaijan, as the Turkish government does not normally engage in this area. Cankorel put this concern to rest, however, stating that Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister had asked Cankorel during their first meeting for special treatment, but Cankorel clearly "drew a line" stating that he represents the OSCE in this country. Cankorel believes Azerbaijan's interests are firmly tied to the West, and the GOAJ knows it has no other choice. Overall, Cankorel believes the OSCE policy in Azerbaijan is to keep the GOAJ on board with the West at a strategic level, and try its hardest on the details. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) On June 4 the Ambassador met with the new head of the OSCE Office in Baku Ambassador Ali Bilge Cankorel. Cankorel has served for 38 years in the Turkish diplomatic service and previously served as Turkey's Ambassador to Ukraine and to Afghanistan. The U.S. supported his candidacy for this post.

¶3. (C) Cankorel began the meeting by saying that it will take time for Azerbaijan to reform, and the international community should be grateful when Azerbaijan is moving forward. He questioned, however, whether Azerbaijan was moving in the right direction of late. Cankorel said he had attended a meeting earlier in the day on the subject of regulating the internet where he was shocked to hear presidential advisor Ali Hasanov and head of the National Radio and Television Council Nushirvan Maharramli describing the internet as a "new sickness in the country." (Note: Embassy PAO also attended the conference and confirms these speakers did in fact advocate for the government to control what is on the internet. PAO also confirms that Cankorel made a strong speech at this event in favor of internet freedom. End Note.) Cankorel noted, however, that he felt the GOAJ would listen to the "right message" and that they know their future is in the Western world. Surprisingly, he also added that "all true friends, which is not Russia" advise the GOAJ against these restrictive tendencies.

¶4. (C) Cankorel stated that there were some tensions in the relationship between the GOAJ and the OSCE office when he first arrived in April, but these issues were now solved. (Note: These tensions led to the last-minute cancellation of an OSCE conference on security. End note.) Cankorel noted, however, that the GOAJ does not understand or accept that his

office is not involved in mediation of the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict, and this issue still leads to tensions. But the GOAJ is no longer questioning its relations with the OSCE, and in fact has asked Cankorel to expand the Office's work.

15. (C) Cankorel also noted that he had to "draw a line" in his introductory meeting with Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister Mammadyarov. According to Cankorel, Mammadyarov asked in this first meeting for "special treatment" from the OSCE office, now that a Turkish diplomat was in charge, in the way in which Mammadyarov says Armenia receives special treatment because a Russian is in charge of the OSCE Office in Yerevan.

Cankorel says he was very firm with Mammadyarov in stating that he does not represent Turkey in this post. Cankorel said he has not heard this argument since this meeting, however. During his meeting with President Aliyev, Cankorel says he heard the "standard speech" about the West using double standards to judge Azerbaijan, and that Azerbaijan still has other options rather than joining the West. Cankorel said, however, that he left with the impression that President Aliyev knows he has no other choice but to join the West, and that this speech was simply an "amateurish way of lobbying" for its positions.

16. (C) Cankorel ended the meeting by stating that Azerbaijan's destiny lies with the Euro-Atlantic structures, but much depends on how the GOAJ feels that it is treated. He said that the overall OSCE policy in Azerbaijan is to keep the country on board with the West at the strategic level. After that, the OSCE would try its best on the details. He

BAKU 00000465 002 OF 002

wants to keep engaging with the GOAJ without burning any bridges.

COMMENT

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17. (C) Cankorel seems to have a clear understanding of the problems facing Azerbaijan in meeting its OSCE commitments, and the difficulties of encouraging the GOAJ to take up these important reforms. While it is unsurprising that the GOAJ would expect favorable treatment from a Turkish diplomat filling the role of OSCE Ambassador, it is fortunate that Cankorel is professional enough to make it clear that this will not be the case. However, Cankorel's tone regarding the pace of change and the need not to burn bridges does contrast with his predecessor's (Spanish democracy specialist Jose Luis Herrero Ansola) more active policy of pursuing reform.

DERSE